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ABSTRACT

The Intermountain Community Learning and Information Services (ICLIS) worked for 18 months to develop a model program to meet the educational and informational needs of rural adults by combining traditional methods and innovative technologies. The model consists of five concentric rings around a rural population circle with three additional circles connected from the outside. At the center of the matrix is the rural population. The next ring represents the ICLIS and Community Information Specialists located in the local public library of the project's two pilot sites (both located in Wyoming). The information specialists function as the brokers and channels through which needs and information flow between the inner and outer circles. The next ring to the community resources consists of the Wyoming Project Office (which is responsible for planning, development, fiscal, and management operations) and the project advisory group (13 representatives of resources and agencies throughout the state who are essentially responsible for connecting the next ring of external entities to the inner rings and target audience). The next two rings represent the major resource areas or links to those resources that are located inside and outside Wyoming. The outer ring represents interstate linkages within the project as well as the three other states participating in the project (Colorado, Montana, and Utah). ICLIS has already managed to further the educational opportunities for rural adults by establishing a microcomputer network, providing public access to library-based microcomputers, installing audioconferencing facilities, and offering two teleconferencing courses. An online interactive information exchange system is also being developed. (MN)

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ICLIS - A Model for Empowering the Rural Adult Learner

A paper presented at the 1987 Conference of the
American Association for Adult and Continuing Education

October 22, 1987

by Dr. Donna L. Whitson

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ICLIS - A Model for Empowering the Rural Adult Learner

Isolation is relative. In New York City you may feel alone, but consider living in an entire state with fewer than 476,000 other citizens scattered over nearly 98,000 square miles. Cities--or crossroads--are separated by vast distances as well as mountain ranges, plains and hazardous winter travel conditions. To go anyplace by car may take most of the day--if the weather permits. Air travel is still an adventure, unless you pilot your own plane. Education?: Wyoming has one university, seven community colleges and public schools. Communication?: radio signals fade between towns, TV relies on translator stations, but telephones work in most places.

While all rural Americans share these common inconveniences and disadvantages not apparent to their urban neighbors, physical isolation is definitely intensified in the intermountain west states of Wyoming, Utah, Montana, and Colorado. Ideally rural residents should have access to the same information and educational opportunities as urban dwellers. In reality, we know that just isn't so. Although Roger McCannon's study in 1985 revealed that rural learners were remarkably similar to urban learners in their educational needs. The contrast is availability of educational and informational services in rural areas. Rural residents comprise nearly twenty-seven percent of the nation's adult learners. Situational differences have denied access to educational opportunities for nearly one-third of America's adults.

In today's information intensive world, indeed information is power. Success for all of us, rural or urban, depends more than ever on our access to information and education. Because information is no

longer limited to the printed word, we must also be technology literate to be able to access information.

In September of 1986 the Northwest Action Agenda for Postsecondary Education issued a report entitled, "Barriers to Rural Adult Education: A Survey of Seven Northwest States." Wyoming was included in the survey. The key findings of that study were many of the same constraints I've listed--geographic isolation, weather, lack of information about educational offerings, limited access to libraries and information access to libraries and information sources, familiarity with new learning technologies and a lack of a comprehensive compilation or source for finding out about information and education may be available.

During the past 18 months, the Intermountain Community Learning and Information Services project has been working to develop a model program for meeting the educational and informational needs of rural adults delivered through innovative technologies and traditional methods. Local public libraries are the focus of the project with direct cooperative links to land grant universities, state libraries, the Cooperative Extension Service and a number of other local, state, regional and national resources. A survey of most rural communities points to the public library as a nonthreatening community center where most adults feel comfortable. Public libraries have been involved in adult education in this country since Benjamin Franklin's time. Today there are over 8,000 public libraries across the United States.

After working, thinking and designing for several months, the Wyoming ICLIS personnel developed a model to represent the project as it should function. In an effort to express the complexities and

interdependence of all levels of the project; a web, defined as a complex network or a latticed, interwoven structure, seemed to best describe ICLIS in Wyoming. The organization is not vertical or horizontal but suggests an image of concentric circles operating from the inside out and the outside in. Of great importance are the regional and national networks tied to the project. Without those resources, there would be little to deliver locally. And without the local ties, there would be no place to deliver the information from those resources. Therefore, circles surrounding the rural resident represent layers of people and resources to facilitate meeting the informational and educational needs of the rural population.

RURAL POPULATION

The model consists of five concentric rings around a rural population circle, with three additional circles connected from the outside. At the center of the matrix is the rural population--the central focus of the project. To quote Arlon Elser of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, "The bottom line of this project is whether or not we make a difference in the lives of these rural people."

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

The next ring represents ICLIS and the Community Information Specialist (CIS) located in the local public library of the two pilot sites in Douglas and Rawlins. The Information Specialists are guided by a local Community Resource Advisory Group comprised of representatives from the school district, mental health, public health, Chamber of Commerce, DEPASS (social services), cooperative extension, libraries, law enforcement, economic planning councils, ministerial associations, small business owners and service organizations.

The Information Specialist is a key element in the success of how the outer circles relate to the target and vice versa. They are the brokers and the channels through which needs and information flow. Until this project, no one in the community served in the same capacity as the CIS. Different individuals and organizations were separately offering parts and fragments of CIS functions. The CIS must know the target circle as well as all the other rings. They must possess knowledge and understanding of all populations. The problem in the past has been getting the information to flow to the target and the needs to flow from the target to the sources. The CISs are the catalysts for facilitating this transfer process. The successful CIS is best described as an innovator, risk-taker, a maverick who has a strong belief in the project.

PROGRAM SUPPORT

In the ring next to the Community Resources is the Wyoming Project Office, consisting of the state leader and a project coordinator located at the University of Wyoming Libraries in Laramie. Project administration is conducted through this office. Planning, development, fiscal, and management operations are conducted under the direction of the state leader and carried out through the coordinator's office.

The Wyoming Project Advisory Group consists of thirteen individuals representing various resources and agencies from around the state connected to the project. They are essential in connecting the next ring of external entities to the inner rings and target.

STATE RESOURCES

The next ring represents the major resource areas or links to those resources within the state. The wealth of expertise and information found in this division of the web are essential components for making the project work. It is this information and these people we are trying to deliver to the rural population. Currently these resources include the University of Wyoming Libraries, the State Library, U.W. Cooperative Extension, the Health Sciences Information Network, the State Department of Education, the U.W. Department of Adult Education, and the U.W. School of Extended Studies. The blanks in this ring represent additions we anticipate in the future.

REGIONAL AND NATIONAL RESOURCES

Reaching outside Wyoming to establish ties and resources is also essential to project success. Presently regional and national links include the Regional Project Office (MSO), IBM, National Technical Information Service (NTIS), the database vendors, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Again, the blank spaces represent growth for resources to be added as the program progresses.

INTERSTATE LINKAGE

The outer ring represents interstate linkages within the project. Attached to it are the three other states of the project. Within each of these circles is the organizational structure of ICLIS in Colorado, Montana and Utah. A fourth circle represents project the potential for expansion to other parts of the country.

Thus far the Wyoming ICLIS project has accomplished a number of objectives toward achieving our goal of developing and demonstrating

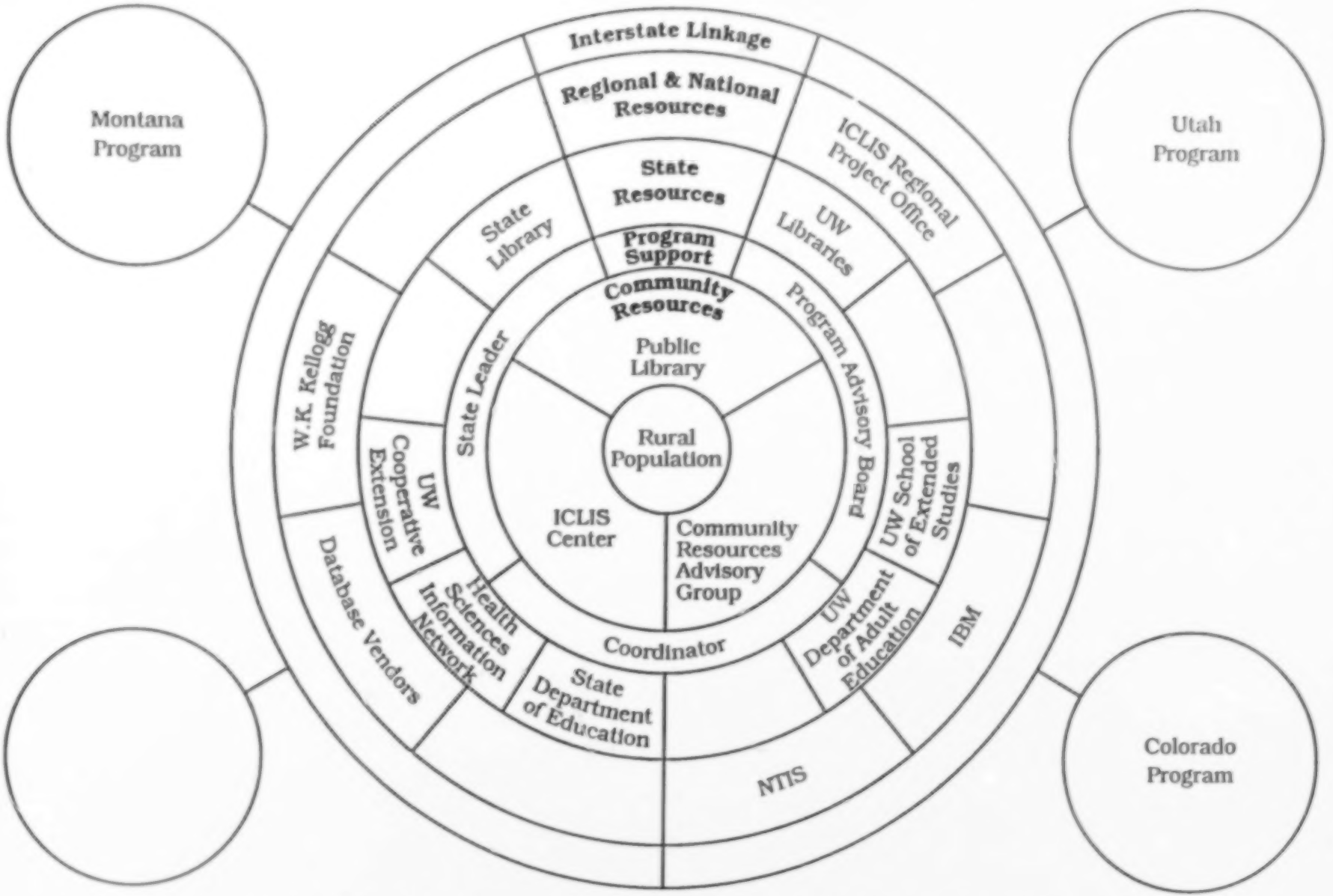
improved ways to provide educational and informational services and resources to people in rural areas.

1. Community Information Specialists were hired in each location. They conducted a needs analysis initially and continue to monitor the community's changing educational and informational concerns.
2. A microcomputer network has been established in the four state region for communication.
3. Database searches providing access to more than 200 information sources are available in the rural public library sites.
4. Public access microcomputers and software are also available in those library information centers.
5. One credit course has been developed and produced and plans are underway for five more during the next two years.
6. Audioconferencing facilities have been installed in the pilot sites and two credit teleconferencing courses were available this fall in the sites.
7. By Spring of 1988, an online interactive system called Optel will be added to the audioconferencing system to all exchange of written materials, graphics, etc., in real time.
8. In addition to credit classes, noncredit programs are also planned for this delivery system. This fall a statewide audioconference about Chinese heritage in Wyoming will be offered. Later a short course in the computer software program WordPerfect will be delivered.

9. The Community Information Specialists located in the Information centers in the public libraries are assisting local governments with information searches. They are establishing educational networks within the local communities.

10. The Wyoming ICLIS sites received a U.S. Dept. Education grant for 20,000.00 beginning this fall to establish a literacy program in the local jails. One of the sites has been granted two VISTA volunteers to work with literacy programs for next year.

If indeed knowledge is power and education and information are keys to knowledge, then ICLIS is helping to empower rural adults. Informational support and educational opportunities from literacy and adult basic education to graduate level university courses are being innovatively delivered to rural residents in Wyoming.



Intermountain Community Learning and Information Services

The Wyoming Program